



SPARK GAP

Vol. 34, Issue 12, December 2017 *MARC - Serving Central Indiana Communities for thirty-four years*

On Our MARC:

Season's Greetings!

A New Year is right around the corner. Where did the year go? I would like to thank everyone for all they have done for the club in 2017. Together, we have accomplished a lot.

Saturday, Dec. 16th at 8:00 a.m., we will have our annual Christmas pitch breakfast and club meeting. We will also be having a white elephant gift exchange. For your viewing pleasure we will also get a chance to see the premier of the MARC year-in-review video from Parker Productions. We hope that you will be able to join us.

Just a reminder that Dec. 31st marks the end of our membership year. It is time for all of us to renew our dues and support our club. At \$18 per year, a MARC membership is one of the best deals around. Please see Marlys Barr, KC9BHM, about getting dues current for 2018.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy and safe New Year!! May your holiday season be filled with the joy of family, friends and peace. May good health and prosperity be yours in 2018.

Jacki KI6QOG
President





Birthdays for the month of December:

AE9H-Phil Melick

KC9YIA-Chris Rose

N9LLP-Rusty Kirts

KQ9Y-Chris Frederick

A Ham Radio Operator's Night Before Christmas

T'was the night before Christmas,

And all through two-meters,

Not a signal was keying up

Any repeaters.

The antennas reached up

From the tower, quite high,

To catch the weak signals

That bounced from the sky.

The children, Tech-Pluses,

Took their HTs to bed,

And dreamed of the day

They'd be Extras, instead.

Mom put on her headphones,

I plugged in the key,

And we tuned 40 meters

For that rare ZK3.

When the meter was pegged

by a signal with power.

It smoked a small diode,

and, I swear, shook the tower.

Mom yanked off her phones,

And with all she could muster

Logged a spot of the signal

On the DX Packet Cluster,

While I ran to the window

And peered up at the sky,
To see what could generate
RF that high.
It was way in the distance,
But the moon made it gleam—
A flying sleigh, with an
Eight element beam,
And a little old driver
who looked slightly mean.
So I thought for a moment,
That it might be Wayne Green.
But no, it was Santa
The Santa of Hams.
On a mission, this Christmas
To clean up the bands.
He circled the tower,
Then stopped in his track,
And he slid down the coax
Right into the shack.
While Mom and I hid
Behind stacks of CQ,
This Santa of hamming
Knew just what to do.
He cleared off the shack desk
Of paper and parts,
And filled out all my late QSLs
For a start.
He ran copper braid,
Took a steel rod and pounded
It into the earth, till
The station was grounded.
He tightened loose fittings,
Re-soldered connections,
Cranked down modulation,
Installed lightning protection.
He neutralized tubes
In my linear amp...
(Never worked right before—
Now it works like a champ).

A new, low-pass filter
Cleaned up the TV,
He corrected the settings
In my TNC.
He repaired the computer
That would not compute,
And he backed up the hard drive
And got it to boot.
Then, he reached really deep
In the bag that he brought,
And he pulled out a big box,
“A new rig?” I thought!
“A new Kenwood? An Icom?
A Yaesu, for me?!”
(If he thought I’d been bad
it might be QRP!)
Yes! The Ultimate Station!
How could I deserve this?
Could it be all those hours
that I worked Public Service?
He hooked it all up
And in record time, quickly
Worked 100 countries,
All down on 160.
I should have been happy,
It was my call he sent,
But the cards and the postage
Will cost two month’s rent!
He made final adjustments,
And left a card by the key:
“To Gary, from Santa Claus.
Seventy-Three.”
Then he grabbed his HT,
Looked me straight in the eye,
Punched a code on the pad,
And was gone—no good bye.
I ran back to the station,
And the pile-up was big,
But a card from St. Nick

Would be worth my new rig.
Oh, too late, for his final
came over the air.
It was copied all over.
It was heard everywhere.
The Ham's Santa exclaimed
What a ham might expect,
“Merry Christmas to all,
And to all, good DX.”

..... thanks to Bruce K9ICP for finding this poem



***MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY HOLIDAYS
FROM THE
MID-STATE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB***



MARC Xmas wish list

T'was a week before Christmas, And all through the county, The Hams were waiting for Santa's large



bounty. Little John McGrath, his bright eyes quite wide, wants a Hustler AV-18 for Santa to hide.



Now Noel Mortier, wasn't waiting for luck, an elf dropped off a FTM400XDR for his pickup truck.



There's Ken and Maryls, the Barr's they must be, she wants a new iPhone and a Palm Mini-key for he.



Bill Jackson is humble, his quest is so fine, an MFJ tuner, a nine thirty-nine.



For little Bruce Tisdale, a Christmas motivation, all he wants for New Years, is good propagation.



An embroidered call sign cap with letters K.9.O.M.T, for Mike Turner this is special, Santa please leave one by his tree.

This list is so short, it's far from complete, wishing all a Merry Christmas, a poem for a treat.



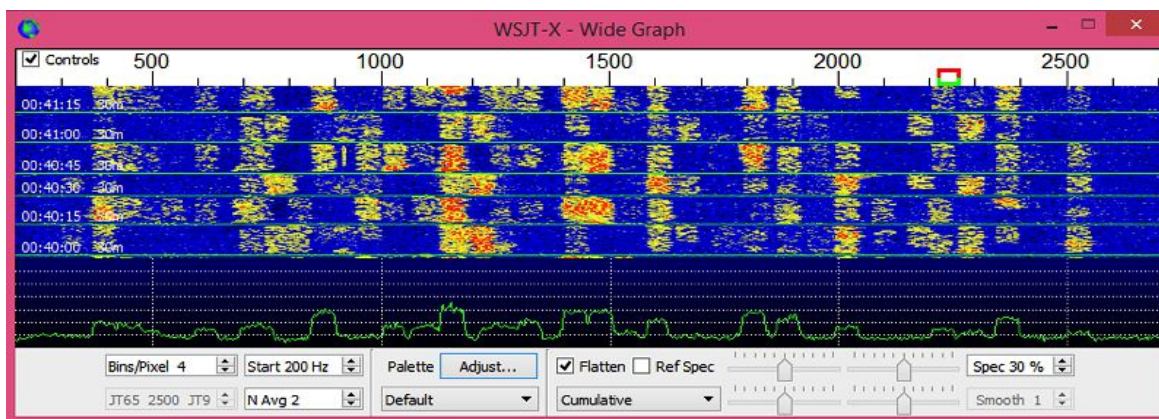
Jack w8ish

FT-8: I'm not really feeling the magic

By Dan Romanchik, KB6NU

Partly out of curiosity and partly because Jeff, KE9V, shamed me into it, I setup my Signalink interface, downloaded WSJT-X from <https://physics.princeton.edu/pulsar/k1jt/wsjt.html>, and started operating FT-8, the latest “shiny object” (as the ARRL dubbed it) from the K1JT team. As you probably know, this mode has really caught on with the digital crowd, and the waterfall is chock full of FT-8 signals. Part of the reason for this is that it has some of the characteristics of JT-65, but is not as excruciatingly slow.

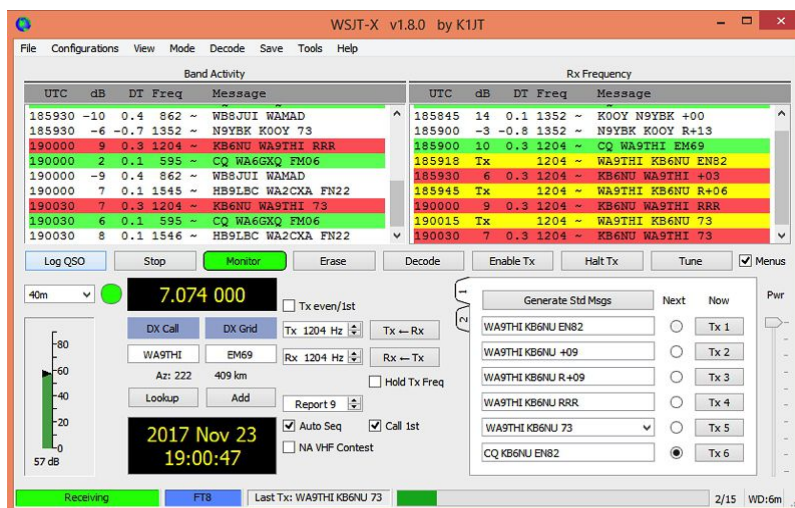
A waterfall display generated by WSJT-X at 7:30 pm, 11/23/17.



Over the past couple of days, I've made 32 QSOs, including a couple of DX contacts. It's been fun to try something new, but to be honest, I'm not really feeling the magic.

Part of it is that I don't feel like I'm really doing anything. I downloaded the software, plugged in my digital interface, fooled around with the settings a bit, and then, the computer started making contacts. I have to click a few on-screen controls to make contacts, but even that's a step that could be easily programmed in by the WSJT-X developers. (In fact, I wonder why they haven't done that already!)

WSJT-X screenshot. The sequence of transmissions in the Rx Frequency window comprises a contact.



Take a look at the screenshot above to see how a typical contact happens. When a CQ appears in the “Band Activity” window, you double click on it. When you do this, the software begins listening for signals on that frequency. In this case, I double-clicked on the CQ by WA9THI. When I double-clicked on the CQ, the program began decoding signals on that frequency and display the transmissions in the “Rx Frequency” window.

Then, I clicked on “Enable TX” and the program began the contact sequence, sending “WA9THI KB6NU EN82.” EN82 is my grid designator. This is shown as the first yellow line in the Rx Frequency window. The transmissions that I sent are highlighted in yellow. The transmissions sent by WA9THI are highlighted in red.

The sequence of transmissions shown there comprise a complete contact, and that whole process takes less than two minutes. And, once WA9THI received my first transmission, the sequence is all automatic. You just sit there and watch the two computers talk to one another.

While I can certainly appreciate the thought and the work that went into the design of the protocol and programming to implement it, sitting and watching the computers talk to one another just doesn’t excite me. On the other hand, if you’re one of those guys who wants to make contacts, but doesn’t really want to talk to anyone, than this is the mode for you!

Here are a few more notes about FT-8 operation:

- Not surprisingly, synchronizing your computer with the other stations computer is very important. To do that, you need to get your computer to use the network time protocol (NTP). I failed to do this when I first installed WSJT-X, and while my waterfall was full of FT-8 signals, WSJT-X just wouldn’t decode them.
- I got my PC laptop to talk ntp by installing Meinberg NTP software (<http://www.ntp.org/ntpfaq/NTP-s-def.htm>). Once I did that, WSJT-X magically started decoding transmissions.
- Most of the cool guys seem to be using Meinberg NTP, but there are other options. One of the guys in our club is using a program called Dimension 4, for example.
- Apparently, you don’t have to limit your power output as you would with PSK-31. At first, I set my output power to 10 W. I had a bit of success at 10 W, but I expected more. When I asked on Twitter how much power other guys were using, most of them said that they were using more than that.
- For the last couple of sessions, I’ve been setting my output power to 25 W, and I’ve been having more success. I’ve now worked several Europeans on 30m.
- Even at 25 W, my signal reports are more often than not not as good as the signal reports I’m handing out. I haven’t figured this one out yet. This doesn’t happen to me when I’m operating CW, so I don’t think it’s my antenna.
- When I’m operating, I write down the calls of stations I’ve contacted. The reason for this is that while WSJT-X does have a logging function, it doesn’t have a log window, so unless you have a great memory, you could end up working guys two or three times a session. That’s probably not a big deal since contacts are so quick, but I’d rather avoid doing that if I can.
- WSJT-X works “split.” While most contacts take place on the same frequency, a station can call you anywhere in the passband of your receiver and WSJT-X will decoded the signal and begin a contact. This threw me the first time or two that this happened, and I tried to change my transmit frequency to match the other station’s. In doing so, I messed up the sequence. I now

just let the contact proceed normally, and it works out great.

- When I work the other digital modes, I set my IC-746PRO to the USB-D mode. In this mode, the receive passband is narrower than for working phone. When operating FT-8, however, you don't want to limit that passband. Signals will appear across the entire 2.6 kHz of the USB signal, and if you narrow the passband, you won't be able to work those stations.
- WSJT-X checks the validity of call signs. This afternoon, there was a guy who had typed in his call as "WAMAD" and was calling CQ. WSJT-X wouldn't let me answer that CQ.
- Operating this mode opens up the possibility of working more stations whose callsigns spell words and adding those QSL cards to my collection. I have, for example, already worked K1GUY, N4HER, and N5SLY. I'm guessing that these guys don't operate CW.

All told, I've found this to be an interesting foray into a new digital mode. While I'm not feeling the magic that some others seem to be feeling when operating FT-8, it certainly will be a change of pace to operate this mode from time to time. Give it a shot and tell me what you think.

Dan, KB6NU, is the author of the "No Nonsense" amateur radio license study guides and blogs about amateur radio at KB6NU.Com. When he's not working FT-8, he teaches ham radio classes and operates CW on the HF bands. You can email him at cwgeek@kb6nu.com.



**"OK, I get it! You
don't like being
disturbed during the
contest!"**

UP – COMING ACTIVITIES AND HAMFESTS

12/16/2017 – 0800 MARC Monthly meeting at the Johnson County REMC.

Annual Christmas Pitch-in Breakfast

Johnson County REMC 750 International Drive Franklin, IN 46131.

01/20/2018 – 0800 MARC Monthly meeting at the Johnson County REMC.

Johnson County REMC 750 International Drive Franklin, IN 46131.

02/17/2018 – 0800 MARC Monthly meeting at the Johnson County REMC.

Johnson County REMC 750 International Drive Franklin, IN 46131.

03/17/2018 – 0800 MARC Monthly meeting at the Johnson County REMC.

Johnson County REMC 750 International Drive Franklin, IN 46131.



RFinder WW Repeater Directory

<http://subscribe.rfinder.net>

CLUB DUES FOR 2018

It is that time of year for your dues for the Mid-State Amateur Radio Club. The dues are still \$18.00 and they have remained that amount for many years. This also a good time to update any of your information for club records such as licence upgrade, change of address or call sign.

This is also a good opportunity for new members to join our club and join in our club activities.

**Please see Marlys Barr, KC9BHM
M.A.R.C. Treasurer**

MID-SATE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

The Mid-State Amateur Radio Club meets the **THIRD SATURDAY** of each month at the Johnson County REMC 750 International Drive Franklin, IN 46131.

See our website, www.midstatehams.org, for maps on how to get to our meeting.

Everyone is welcome; you do not have to be a *HAM* to attend our meetings or a member of the club.

WA9RDF Repeater:

146.835/
146.235 MHz
(151.4 Hz PL Tone)

Club Officers:

President: Jacki Frederick – KI6QOG
Vice President: Ron Schuetz -K9THR
Secretary: Rhonda Curtis – WS9H
Treasurer: Marlys Barr – KD9BHM
Repeater Trustee - Chris Frederick – KQ9Y

WA9RDF Repeater:

443.525/
448.525 MHz
(151.4 Hz PL Tone)

Weekly Net: Sunday evening 7:00 PM ARES/RACES members and ALL RADIO AMATEURS
146.835/146.235 MHz (151.4 Hz PL Tone)

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Spark Gap Editor: Robert LaGrange N9SIU

Please send your articles to my email: n9siu@yahoo.com no later than the 3rd of the month



Special thanks to Johnson County REMC for the use of their community room for meetings and testing.